

ASKEW (H.F.) *J.J. Woodward M.D.*
With the respects of H. F. Askew.

ADDRESS

OF



HENRY F. ASKEW, M.D.,

PRESIDENT OF THE ASSOCIATION.



EXTRACTED FROM THE
TRANSACTIONS OF THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION.

PHILADELPHIA:
COLLINS, PRINTER, 705 JAYNE STREET.

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HENRY E. ASKEW, M.D.

PHYSICIAN TO THE POOR

1855. NOV. 24. CHICAGO.

RECOMMENDED FOR MEDICAL PRACTICE.

DR. HENRY E. ASKEW,

PHYSICIAN TO THE POOR, 851 DEADERICK ST., BIRMINGHAM, ALA.

700 L.

A D D R E S S.

MEMBERS OF THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION—

GENTLEMEN: Allow me to congratulate you on our being permitted to assemble once more, on this the twentieth anniversary of our organization, for a high and noble—may I not add a holy?—purpose.

It pleased the Association, at our last session in the city of Baltimore, to call me, very unexpectedly to myself, to preside over your deliberations during the present year. This is an honor justly esteemed the highest gift from the medical profession, and would imperatively demand grateful acknowledgment from one far more distinguished and worthy of pre-eminence in the fraternity of the profession than I can imagine myself to be; and if I fail to express in suitable language a proper appreciation of your confidence and kindness, let it be attributed to any other deficiency rather than to a want of heartfelt feeling.

With your generous support and indulgence, I will endeavor to perform the duties of the chair to the best of my ability, but must beg you to remember that it is a position not to be approached without diffidence, if not trepidation. During twenty years this post has been consecutively filled by many of the brightest lights of American medical science; and by not a few who have passed the dark river, leaving behind them universal regret and a world-wide fame. From this chair you have listened to the eloquence and learning of a Chapman, a Stevens, a Warren, a Mussey, a Moultrie, a Wellford, a Knight, a Parsons, a Pope, a Wood, a Pitcher, an Eve, a Jewell, a March, a Davis, and a Storer; men from all sections of our favored land, but whose reputation is bounded by no geographical limits—citizens of the universal republic of science. It is not surprising, then, that I should crave,

and trust I shall receive, your indulgence for any shortcomings in the performance of the duties you have seen proper to impose on one so little worthy and so little qualified.

Yes, gentlemen, twenty years have now elapsed since, through the persevering energy and "go-ahead" principle of one of our most valued and best members¹—whom Providence, in His mercy, permits us annually to welcome as still in active and industrial fellowship with us—the New York State Medical Society invited the physicians and surgeons of the United States to meet in convention in the city of New York, to discuss the general interests of the profession and the means of improving medical instruction in America. That Convention assembled according to the call, found itself composed of one hundred and twenty members, representing sixteen States of this confederacy, North and South, and, organizing itself under the presidency of a justly distinguished son of Connecticut, the late Jonathan Knight, M. D., proceeded to business in the appointment of committees and other matters pertinent thereto. That Convention adjourned to meet in Philadelphia in the subsequent year, when, under the presidency of the illustrious Chapman, the resolutions of that learned body were adopted, and from those resolutions this Association took its rise; and as it is perhaps not unwise to make frequent reference to a document that may be regarded as a kind of preliminary charter, containing in condensed form an outline of the broad purposes of our organization, I will venture here to repeat it:—

"Resolved, That it is expedient for the medical profession of the United States to institute a national medical association, for the protection of their interests, for the maintenance of their honor and respectability, for the advancement of their knowledge, and the extension of their usefulness."

The germ thus planted has become matured into a gigantic and powerful institution, embracing in its fraternity the best minds and men of the highest distinction in the profession, from all the States of this vast Union. Seventeen volumes of *Transactions*, containing more than fifteen thousand pages of printed matter, already give evidence of the zeal and industry of its members, and we are here again convened to add another volume to the series.

Though the presiding officer of this Association, as was happily observed by a former President,² in the address of 1860, enjoys

¹ N. S. Davis, M. D.

² H. Miller, M. D.

by law but little privilege, and is charged with scarce any duties beyond the preservation of order and the application of parliamentary rules during the discussions which occur at our meetings, precedent permits and custom warrants the expectation that he will offer at the commencement of each session a few introductory remarks bearing upon some of the thousand subjects that fall within the almost indefinable limits of our studies and our action; but as all reports on the progress of the science, and all papers on practical, ethical, or other subjects, designed to be laid before us, are referred by rule to some one of the sections or appropriate committees before their presentation in detail for the action of the Association, there remains to the occupant of this chair but little choice of subject pertinent to the position, beyond a mere commentary or criticism upon the organization, the past action, or prospective usefulness of the Association.

To do justice to a complete review of a field so vast, would require an expenditure of time and space far beyond my affording and your endurance. You will pardon me, then, for the discursive and perhaps feebly connected character of the observations I propose to make, in the hope that at least some among them may be suggestive of useful action or reflection in furtherance of our high mission as national representatives of a learned, a liberal, and a charitable profession.

Were we called upon to systematize, in the order of their strictly logical sequences, the various purposes of our organization, as set forth in the resolution of the medical convention of 1846, it forcibly impresses us that first and highest upon the category would appear "the advancement of our knowledge;" for upon the extent and value of its *knowledge* the *respectability* of a learned profession is directly dependent; and its "*honor*" should flow solely from the liberal and manly manner in which that knowledge is employed for the benefit of the species and society. By constantly remembering that the first duty of the physician is to consult the well-being of his patient, rather than his own, by the avoidance of all narrow selfishness, all boastful pretension, all sinister jealousy of successful rivals, all uncourteous or neglectful demeanor towards less fortunate competitors—by fostering the fraternity and cultivating the *esprit de corps* of the profession, while firmly but mildly maintaining our individual dignity and rights in our intercourse with our brethren and with the public—we will most effectively

"promote our usefulness," and secure, as a necessary consequence, the "*protection of our interests.*"

Let us ask ourselves, then, whether the advancement of our knowledge, through the labors of so many years, has been such as to enhance our honor and extend our usefulness. A candid examination of our seventeen volumes will prove that we have not been idle. They are rich in valuable papers, many of them of great merit—original essays, critical commentaries, monographs, specialties, statistical reports, and details of medical topography, in not a few instances elaborately illustrated at a heavy expense. It is true our roll of membership includes more than three thousand names; but when we recollect that fellowship in this Association is confined almost exclusively to those who are involved in the cares and hourly engrossments of a most arduous profession, may it not be considered remarkable that so much has been accomplished?

But it is upon the *quality*, and not upon the *quantity* of the material, that we must rest our reputation: it cannot be denied that occasionally articles of less importance have found their way into our annals, increasing the expense of publication, perhaps without proportional advantage. This is an evil almost inevitable in any species of journalism, and more difficult to be avoided by us from the peculiar nature of our organization, calling the practitioners from duties which will not admit of long detention, and from an expanse of territory almost continental; both which circumstances restrict us to short annual sessions. For this and other reasons, the Association very properly announces to the world that it does not hold itself responsible for all the opinions and doctrines advanced in the various papers, the general contents of which may meet its approval, and are published in its *Transactions*.

Still, when we take into consideration the years of political turmoil and civil strife—the birth, struggles, and death of the most gigantic civil war the world has ever known—which have occupied so many years of the interval that has elapsed since the date of our foundation—the social division that has necessarily sectionalized for a time even *our* department of the great republic of letters, and deprived us of the aid and presence of so many valued brothers—some by death in the field, and some by real or supposed patriotic duty: we may justly claim and believe that the world, if it should become duly informed of our labors, will assuredly acknowledge that both the quantity and quality of our contributions to science entitle us to no mean rank in the category of

learned societies. So far, then, our action has liberally contributed to the furtherance of our objects. It "has advanced our knowledge," entitled us to additional "honor" and "respectability," and "extended our usefulness."

The true artist, however high in his reputation, however lauded by others, is never satisfied with his accomplishments; and in this instinct of rigid self-criticism lies the great success of corporate as well as individual progress. We have done *well*; but, gentlemen, can we not do *better*? I trust no one will suspect me of the slightest shadow of an intention to cast censure upon the past, or with any design to interfere with the more deliberate discussions of the sections, in the brief remarks I may venture, upon the future of our labors. The one would be presumptuous and the other impudent. I shall, therefore, endeavor, as far as possible, to pursue the *Socratic* rather than the *Platonic* method of presenting some suggestions, leaving their fitness and importance to be determined by your better and more mature judgment.

Agreeably to our present regulations, all papers, whatever may be the nature of the subjects, or the professional standing of the authors (except the reports of the regular standing committees), are first presented to the Association, to be read by their captions with short abstracts of their contents, and are then referred to the appropriate section. If approved, and esteemed of sufficient value to be interesting or instructing to the profession at large, they are returned to the Association with the recommendation that they be referred to the Committee of Publication. They may then be read in detail, and submitted to general commentary or debate. But our sessions are necessarily so short, and the demands upon our time, through the overflowing courtesy of the citizens of the great capitals in which we have convened—courtesies that cannot be ignored without the sacrifice of one of our most important objects, "the protection of our honor and respectability"—that the full discussion of the most elaborate essays before the whole Association becomes an impossibility, and as an inevitable consequence, they pass at once into the hands of the Committee of Publication, accompanied only by such meagre remarks, if any, as the proper Section may append to its report. The Committee of Publication neither desires nor enjoys any discretionary power; its duties are purely executive; it can neither enlarge, abridge, nor comment, much less revise; this would be a task both burdensome and invidious; it can only publish. It may be said, it is one of the chief objects of the founda-

tion of the Sections to accomplish these very desirable purposes; but, organized as they are, is it possible for them to do so? While *with us*, in our annual meetings, the Sections share the distraction of our time and the natural tendency to social indulgence on the reunion of long severed friends; and they find additional calls upon their attention in the performance of their special duties. How then can they accomplish a task during the session which is beyond the ability of the whole Association in full assembly? But you may reply, Can they not, during the *intervals* of our annual meetings, deliberate more maturely and give us the results in the succeeding year? Certainly, they could, if duly empowered and with the consent of the authors. This would, however, be a task not very anxiously sought for, and the imposition of it upon a committee might be deemed oppressive; yet it would be but pursuing the rule adopted in reference to prize essays. If all communications were therefore submitted to appropriate Sections, coupled with the request to return each paper so referred with such accompanying notes on the subject, references, criticisms, and additional information, as its importance might seem to warrant in their opinion, it might be possible, not only to exclude some matter from our *Transactions* that scarcely repays the expense of publication, but also to add to the value of that which is already highly valuable, and send it forth to the world with somewhat stronger and more available sanction than we can do consistently at present. According to our present custom, many essays, after undergoing a hasty reading before the Section, are simply reported with a recommendation that they be referred to the Committee of Publication, and are ordered to be published, unaccompanied by any further evidence of our action upon them, under our express disavowal of all responsibility for their facts or reasoning, more in the manner of an advertisement than the certificate of a learned body. May I not be permitted to inquire whether any additional rule on this subject can be established for "the further promotion of our usefulness?"

But, gentlemen, there is another matter connected with the publication of our *Transactions*, of which the Publishing Committee believe they have just cause of complaint. By a rule of this Association, all papers intended for publication are required to be in the hands of the Committee complete, on the 20th day of June—a duty but seldom complied with. And, after the Committee furnish the proofs to the authors, whole pages of new matter are

not unfrequently transmitted, and the form of the printer has to be reset. From this fact, an unreasonable delay ensues, and the members of the Association suppose that the Committee is censurable for this delay—an unfair and erroneous conclusion; an evil the Publishing Committee cannot guard against, and which can only be guarded against by withholding the proofs from the authors. In fact, the sending of proofs, and delaying for the corrections, really involve a useless expenditure of time and money, which would be avoided if the Committee would consent to the additional labor of revising the proofs. Another beneficial result which would ensue, is, that gentlemen would more carefully and accurately complete their papers before presenting them to the Association. There is, however, another subject which perhaps more nearly affects the "advancement of our knowledge," if not our "honor."

As I have stated, our membership embraces about three thousand, and our annual attendance of latter years has included about *one-tenth* of that high aggregate. This latter number possibly exceeds what might be reasonably anticipated, when we contemplate the engrossing nature of our home duties, the expense in money as well as time incurred by distant members in reaching the place of convention, and the recent devastation of nearly one-third of the realm, through all the horrors of a civil war. But peace has once more returned, and the familiar faces of some of our southern brothers (would that we could press once more the warm hand of those who have fallen on either side upon the field of battle) begin to reappear amongst us. Let us hope that our annual meetings will henceforth regularly increase; but what avails the publication of our labors, if they are not properly distributed and read? I am informed, on the best authority, that the yearly edition of the *Transactions* of this Association was at one time 1000 copies at the cost of three dollars per copy. It has now fallen to about 500, whilst the cost from various sources has increased to five dollars. The annual domestic distribution, at one period reaching 600 to 800, is now reduced to about 350 copies, and excepting the number taken by members in actual attendance, upon whom the reception of the work is made somewhat obligatory, the price being included in their annual contribution, the entire home distribution amounts to less than 100 copies; meanwhile, our annual expenses accumulate from \$2500 to \$3500. It is obvious, then, that the publication of our *Transactions*, upon

which mainly depend the advancement and dissemination of our knowledge by corporate effort, "the maintenance of our influence" as regulators of the profession, and the "protection of our honor and respectability" in the eyes of the scientific world—that publication which should be a source of available revenue, threatens to prove an unnecessary drain upon our resources! Need I apologize, under such circumstances, for making a somewhat anxious inquiry, whether no means can be devised for "the extension of our usefulness," through reform in this direction?

We have been compelled, by our principles, to act with energy in endeavoring to arrest or resist the constant tendency towards a relaxation of rigor in the execution of the laws for violation of professional ethics, which seems inevitable from the inherent imperfections of humanity, and among the very first objects of our Association was the elevation of the system of medical instruction, in order that it may be gradually perfected, and constantly adapted to the almost fearfully rapid progress of science in this active age. And how is the noble purpose which incited this action to be successfully accomplished? Certainly not by distributing the results of our labors almost exclusively to about a *tithe* of our own members, or even by circulating them more widely in the form of printed laws, which, to ourselves, may be similar to those of the Medes and Persians, but exert no influence over others, except what they derive from their obvious foundation in the principles of pure equity, and their applicability from considerations of just expediency. It is easily perceived that the original design of our founders was that the institution should embrace all that is truly worthy and respectable in the profession, excluding none but those who are either morally or intellectually unfit for fellowship with the competent and the worthy. But *does it so embrace?* and *does it so exclude?* Will any who carefully examines the subject candidly reply in the affirmative? While we properly frown upon and disavow all professional and often personal intercourse with those who claim to be medical men in virtue of diplomas granted by institutions established by statute, but which inculcate a "practice based upon an exclusive dogma, to the rejection of the accumulated experience of the profession, and of the aids actually furnished by anatomy, physiology, pathology, and organic chemistry," we should carefully remember that we profess to extend our moral influence, and to a certain extent even endeavor to employ a species of indirect authority, over men and institutions not represented among us.

The law to which I have just alluded is undoubtedly necessary and proper in the main, and it is in the nature of all laws to bear oppressively in certain cases; but as to the possibility of softening its absolute rigor of expression there may be, *indeed there is*, some difference of opinion; and when such questions are debated, and the views of the minority as well as the majority are frankly presented before the parties whose interests are affected, they will bow, if honorable men, to the general necessity which requires their individual sacrifice, or will aid in the endeavor to induce any wise and practicable modification of the law, which may lighten the sacrifice, without weakening the principle. But when the rule is urged and executed dictatorially, without any allowance of individual discretion or any statement of difference of opinion and argument on either side, it naturally engenders a feeling of hostility on the part of those who think themselves aggrieved, and often awakens unreasonable sympathy in the mind of the public, all-incapable as that public is to estimate the true merits of the question. It will ever be found that unnecessary rigor, or too great exclusiveness, or hyper-legislation, in medical affairs, tends to *extend*, not to *curtail*, the domain of empiricism, whilst it lessens the popular standing and social influence of the profession. And if we permit ourselves too closely to practise upon the idea "*l'état c'est mort*," we may cast a shadow on the dignity and diminish the usefulness of the Association.

Do not misunderstand me, gentlemen. I do not pretend to object to the enforcement of these laws as they stand, not having at present any clear perception of a change of phraseology which would render them less oppressive in special cases, thus diminishing the frequency with which they are evaded under circumstances that would scarcely lead to censure even here; but if it were possible to leave to individual discretion some definite latitude in the application of the iron-bound rule in every instance, without endangering the all-important principle upon which it has been founded, the action could not be injurious. The consideration of this possibility, if such consideration be ever thought advisable, I leave to time and your better judgment. My motive in referring to the subject at present is simply to impress upon your attention the fact that we owe it to the "interest" we endeavor to regulate, as well as to our own "honor," that the grounds on which our regulations are founded, the arguments concerning differences of opinion on their propriety, and proofs of the amount of caution

employed by, and the scientific ability and moral standing of those engaged in their enactment, should be clearly presented, not merely to a *tithe* of our membership, but to the whole profession, which is expected to hear and obey, under penalty of our high censure. Why, gentlemen, the very public libraries of the country should exhaust almost the entire edition of six hundred copies of our *Transactions*, and doubtless would do so, if each learned member of this body were induced to exert his individual influence in his immediate neighborhood in furtherance of the object. How desirable such a result would be for our financial "interests," as well as "the extension of our usefulness," I need not say, and therefore leave the suggestion for your future consideration.

Not altogether unconnected with the remarks just offered is a subject that has engaged, to a considerable extent, the attention of the national, State, and county medical societies. I allude to the question of *specialties* in medicine. At our last annual meeting this question was most ably and forcibly brought before us in the majority and minority reports by the Committee on Medical Ethics, to whom it had been referred; and, after discussion, its consideration was indefinitely postponed. This disposition, according to parliamentary usage, terminated the discussion for the session; and although it by no means prohibited original action again at a future session, I have no desire to recall attention to the entire subject at present, interwolved, as it naturally has been, with the question of medical advertisements. Whatever differences of opinion may exist in the profession as to its ethical bearings in this relation, have been fairly presented in the two reports from the Committee; and when cases of undignified and unwarranted attempts to win public notoriety are made by individual specialists, through journals of any character, the maintenance "of our honor and respectability" in each case may be safely intrusted to the State societies and their censors, unless regularly referred, for our opinion, by one or the other of these organizations. But it is now universally acknowledged that the vast advancement of the medical sciences and their practical application, through the ceaseless researches and innumerable discoveries of physicists and physiologists within the last fifty years, have made it almost utterly impossible for any single individual to render himself profoundly acquainted with the whole field of medicine, or equally skilful in every department of the practice. The diploma, with its classical superlatives, expressive of the high perfection in appropriate learn-

ing attained by its possessor, may have been a valid certificate of universal sufficiency in former times, but, independent of the terrible extent to which its character has been degraded by the rash multiplication of schools and the results of improper legislation, will any one pretend that it is so now? The necessity for this organization, our avowal of the imperfection of the system of medical instruction, and our efforts towards reform, compel us to a negative reply. The diploma is, or should be, simply a certificate that the holder has completed his course of *elementary instruction*, and is fitted, in the opinion of his examiners, to *commence* the *general* practice of his profession—that he is prepared to be safely intrusted with the care of human health and life—provided he devotes himself unweariedly to the increase of his knowledge by observation and experience, and stands ever ready to secure to his patients the advantage of consultation with those of greater skill and experience in any direction, general or special, when such assistance is accessible.

From time immemorial, a theoretical *equality* in the brotherhood of medicine has been maintained before the public, because the public is in great degree incapable of estimating medical ability; but this by no means warrants the idea of *sameness in practical skill*; not only the *mental*, but even the physical capacities of different physicians, fit them peculiarly for different branches of the profession, in the *art* as well as the *science*. We do not put the chemist into the anatomical chair, nor call upon the obstetrician to analyze the contents of the stomach. He who can best diagnose a fever or a visceral disease, is rarely qualified to treat iritis or meddle with the Eustachian tube; and even in the same department there are differences. He who is skilled in fractures or luxations, or patiently pursues the orthopedic treatment of deformities, will often hesitate before he undertakes the extraction of a cataract, or attempts a staphyloraphy. Since, then, partial specialties in medicine have been established from the very birth of the science—as in the cases of midwifery and surgery; and since its rapid advancement in recent times tends perpetually to still further divisions of the practice—as in the instance of diseases of the eye and ear—may it not be regarded as unfortunate that, independently of all questions of unprofessional advertisement, there should exist, in so many minds, hostility to the very name of “*specialty?*”—that, instead of attempting to *regulate*, some are disposed to *condemn in toto*, that concentration of the mind upon diseases of certain indi-

vidual organs which, while it has extended so widely our knowledge, and perfected our diagnosis of many structural affections, may gradually unfit the specialist for general practice?

Both the evils and the advantages of specialisms have been so fully though tersely developed in the reports of the Committee on Ethics that I should be guilty of supererogation in offering any further remarks on the *principles* involved in the question; but as it is the chief function of this Association to act as an advisory senate, in behalf of the great body of the profession, I will venture a few suggestions on the subject, if I can claim your forbearance.

In the midst of the vast complexity of the human organization and its functions, there is almost miraculous *unity*. It is impossible to disturb either the structure or functions of a part without disturbance of the whole; and when the original aberration is sufficiently severe to transcend the bounds of health, the consequent affections of other and often very remote parts are exceedingly prone to excite a morbid action also; and the secondary, is very frequently far more obvious and immediately important than the primary affection. Hence the occurrence of a purely *local* disease is extremely rare, and the primary seat and cause of the palpable appearances not only distant but obscure. An intimate and profound familiarity with all pathological reactions is essential to a perfect understanding of nearly every case of serious disease; and this unattainable perfection can only be approached by the experienced general practitioner. The specialist gives his almost undivided attention to the most prominent affection, but, unless previously prepared by general experience, fails in discovering its less glaring complications, and is but too likely to overlook the primary and constitutional aberrations, the corrections of which are essential to the cure. Even if he possess this general experience at the commencement of his special career, the advantage is rapidly diminished; for it is only by continual practice that medical tact can be maintained. The general practitioner, on the contrary, has his attention too much distributed over the wide field of disease, and too much distracted by its variety, ever to arrive at that cultivated delicacy of perception, and that thorough skill in the use of the mechanical means of exploration and even *operation* which are so available in the diagnosis or treatment of the diseases of certain organs. Is it not obvious, then, that in order to secure to the patient all the chances of relief, which the profession is bound in honor to render him, he should receive the advice of both the general prac-

titioner and specialist, in many instances? and might we not with great propriety in many cases encourage such consultations?

Let us instance, for example, the necessary diagnosis of an obscure disease of the lungs or heart: many a distinguished practitioner, who may be an admirable therapist, is deficient either in the extended opportunities for *post-mortem* examinations, or that accurate, if not musical ear, which are both essential to the accomplished *stethoscopist*; while, on the other hand, the very few whose positions in great hospitals and capitals, together with their peculiar natural endowments, should entitle them to eminence in the exploration of affections of the chest, are sometimes singularly deficient in therapeutical ability. In this case the exclusive specialist—M.D. though he be—is rather a naturalist than a physician; and, should he attempt, though properly armed with the *diplomas* of many learned institutions, to advertise himself as peculiarly devoted to the *treatment* of diseases of the lungs and heart, his course would be clearly empirical. As well might the mere tuner of a piano, on that plea alone, claim professional fellowship with a Haydn or a Handel. But are we warranted, on this account, in prohibiting him from making known and useful his peculiar and really important powers, through the medical journals and within the pale of the profession? Should we refuse to the patient the advantage of his assistance, by declining consultation with him—not indeed to share the responsibility of the *treatment* for which he is unfitted, but merely to perfect the diagnosis and aid in detecting the physical changes in the progress of the disease? If he be worthy of social respect, as an honorable man, he will go no farther; if not so worthy, he is ostracized on other grounds than his devotion to a specialty. Such are the endless varieties of sympathies which complicate all morbid actions of the more important viscera, that even a partially exclusive attention to the peculiar affections of either of these organs, if we except, perhaps, the *uterine* and *urinary* apparatus, and the *brain*, renders the practitioner unfit for the treatment of any; and he who announces publicly that he claims superior practical skill in diseases of the lungs, the liver, the stomach, or the bowels, proclaims either his ignorance or his venality, and should be declared “*hors de profession*” at once and without reserve.

But the case is very different with diseases of the eye, ear, and skin; for, while here, also, a familiarity with morbid action in general is absolutely necessary to the proper treatment—as it is even in the practice of the most isolated departments of mechanical

surgery and obstetrics—there is often requisite an extent of observation on the changes of structure in the organ specially affected, and a practical adroitness in the employment of delicate and peculiar instruments in the diagnosis, very seldom attainable by the general practitioner even in the densest centres of population, and utterly beyond the reach of that large majority of our brethren whose allotted spheres of usefulness are confined to sparse communities. Indeed, it might be said without any outrage upon truth, that in some directions the departments of the specialist and practitioner at large are so widely separated, that great eminence in either implies a corresponding deficiency in the other; while both contribute essentially to the perfection of the art of healing.

The progress of *science*, then, and not the action of the *profession*, has effected a division of labor in medicine, and we must meet the inevitable consequences as we may. The application of the microscope in the development of the structure of tissues, and that of the ophthalmoscope, the laryngoscope, and other surgical contrivances in the elucidation of morbid conditions previously concealed, together with the modern discoveries and inventions in chemistry and physics, have so enlarged our means of diagnosis, and so changed our therapeutical treatment of a multitude of ailments, that their frequent employment has become absolutely indispensable. The use of these instruments cannot become universal. The cost of their procurement, and the habitual skill required in their application, forbid it.

With the vast advantage derived from these improvements, and the specialties in medicine to which they have given rise, we have suffered most grievously "in honor and respectability," through the unworthy conduct of some who have seized upon them as a means of winning undeserved reputation, with a public incapable of detecting the deception. Since, then, we cannot condemn, but are honestly bound to encourage certain specialties in medicine, are we not bound in self-defence, and in furtherance of the objects of this Association, to endeavor to point out the means of regulating them? This question must be answered, if not now, then at least at no distant day. We should not discourage the tyro who is disposed to devote unusual attention to a particular class of diseases, provided he does not neglect the *general* studies which are essential to the comprehension of the nature and treatment of *all* disease. We should not censure him by whom the regular course of the profession has been pursued for years under

favorable circumstances, if he see fit to retire from the general practice, to devote himself even exclusively to a particular branch, in which he has enjoyed unusual advantages for acquiring skill; provided only that he bears properly in mind the rapidity with which tact in tracing the primary causes of local diseases, and determining the treatment of its consequent complications, is lost in the absence of continual observation, and resolves never to neglect the aid of his less exclusive brethren, when the interest of his patient properly demands it. But when the young graduate, fresh from the field of his elementary studies, makes haste to lay claim to distinction in the practice of any of the *modern* specialties, after having passed, perhaps, a few months in some *special* hospital, his presumption, though not unnatural to youth, must be viewed by his elders as decidedly unwise. Though his aptitude in the use of some comparatively novel instrument of exploration or treatment may make him very valuable to his seniors in determining an exact diagnosis, in the production of local or general anaesthesia, or the application of remedies to the interior of the larynx, etc., his almost exclusive devotion to the management of a particular class of diseases before his knowledge of pathology is matured, and made available by years of general observation and experience, is dangerous to the character of the profession, and still more so to himself. Are we not bound, then, by a proper fraternal feeling and charity towards aspiring genius, to bring to bear the full weight of our moral influence in discouraging this unfortunate precocity, though less in censure than in pity?

But let me here terminate this subject with an apology for having so long occupied your kind attention, into which I have been drawn more deeply by its intrinsic interest than I had originally designed. Its close connection with the subject of medical advertisements naturally leads me to the vexed question of *empiricism*, both within and without the nominal ranks of the profession, upon which I have but a brief remark to offer.

The foundation of the success of empiricism lies deep in the soil of *popular ignorance*, and yet the profession has constantly frowned upon all attempts to circulate a knowledge of the principles of medicine among the masses. This may have been proper and necessary in the olden time, when science of every kind was exclusively confided to the initiated few, and its diffusion might by possibility have endangered the order of society, under systems of government which would not have withstood the light of

modern days. But we live in an age of revolution. Science now condescends to enter the workshop. The dyer is often a chemist, the machinist a mathematician, and the weaver a student of the fine arts. We may well ask ourselves the question, whether we are not in error in practising an exclusiveness in this respect, no longer approved in any other department of learning or art. That the removal of a *cause* is the surest way to destroy an *effect*, is a truism; and to me it appears evident, that if we would check an evil so incalculably injurious to general health and interest, the people must be educated. For what does it avail us that physicians should be most thoroughly and profoundly educated "in all the ills that flesh is heir to," when an itinerant, avowedly ignorant of the first principles of physiology, hygiene, or pathology—whose only quality is to administer minute particles of medicine either originally inert or made so by "elimination," receives the countenance and succor of a considerable portion of an otherwise intelligent community? The elements of physiology are now taught in many of our higher schools, though very rarely impressed by sufficient anatomical illustration; and some knowledge of the same science and hygiene is still more widely diffused by popular lectures in cities and large towns; and the effect in clipping the wings of empiricism is perceptible to a limited extent. But the influence of this Association, and that of the various bodies we represent, is general and great. Should it not be vigorously exerted to promote the introduction of such studies in all our schools, both public and private, and to increase the classes who attend such lectures whenever delivered? The consequence of such action could not fail to be most beneficial to the public interest and our own; and I leave the question of the expediency to your better judgment.

At nearly every annual meeting from the date of our organization, a committee on the subject of medical education has been elected, and almost as regularly presented a report in the succeeding year; although little important addition seems to have been made, of late years, to the suggestions contained in the earlier reports. The necessity for the better preliminary education of the students, especially in the classical and mathematical departments, as a prerequisite for their admission to matriculation in the collegiate institutions, has been steadily and uniformly urged, though no definite amount of this species of knowledge has been finally fixed upon as essential. The prolongation of the curriculum, and

the extension of the system of instruction by increasing the number of professorships, and the facilities for clinical instruction have been strenuously and repeatedly advocated; and these recommendations have been acceded to in various degrees by many of the colleges. But it may well be doubted (and I make the remark with due deference) whether any very valuable improvement can be effected by these measures, whilst the pupil is suffered, and even expected to attend the lectures on all the different branches, during each annual session, until he receives his *final*, and in this country his *only* official examination. It seems scarcely accountable how this vicious system, so utterly at war with the constitution of the human mind, has been permitted to remain so long in force. What reasonable apology can be offered for a custom that allows, if it does not actually encourage, an ardent and ambitious youth in this "fast" country, to waste his invaluable hours in listening to elaborate discourses upon surgery and midwifery, before he has been taught the structure of a tissue—the route of a single artery, or, perhaps, the position and function of a single muscle?—to sit with a straining brain under the teachings of a professor, whose special department bears for its title that strange *Anglican misnomer* "*the Practice of Physic*," before he is instructed in even the mere natural history of a single article of *materia medica*! Pardon me, gentlemen, for any seeming strength of expression, but the calm gentleness of speech which usually becomes the presence of so learned a body is powerless for the correction of grave abuses. We shall never succeed in effective reform of medical institutions in America, until the minimum limit of the period of collegiate study ceases to be *two short years*, and until our schools consent to imitate the example of continental Europe, in requiring the pupil to study the elementary branches first, and give evidence of his proficiency in them, before entering the vestibule of the practical department. The disease is constitutional, and so must be the remedy.

The propriety of separating the business of medical instruction from that of conferring the degree has also been frequently brought before you, but the measure appears not to have received the general approval of those engaged in collegiate teaching. It is difficult to discover any valid reason for this reluctance to depart from an ancient custom; for, certainly, it should be the great and sufficient ambition of the professors to qualify their pupils for the faithful and correct discharge of their duties to the profession and society; while the establishment of boards of independent examiners would

probably secure us in future against the deep mortification so naturally felt at the rejection of so very large a percentage of graduated applicants for surgical position, by the army and navy medical examiners; a mortification that must fall with peculiar severity upon those by whom the degree had been conferred. Without for one moment suspecting the integrity and impartiality of the teachers, and acknowledging that their daily intercourse with their pupils affords them superior opportunities for acquiring an intimate knowledge of the mental qualifications of the candidates, we should not forget that it may also contribute to soften the rigor of the examinations, and induce the glossing over of occasional defects, in the belief that time, opportunity, and study may correct the evil.

The Committee on Medical Education made no report at the last session, and was discharged at its own request; but the subject should not be lost sight of here. It appears to me that we owe to the interests of the profession the expression of an opinion, more decided than has yet been given, as to the precise amount and nature of the preliminary education which should be demanded of the matriculant, even if we be not called upon to advise the founding of preliminary schools for its acquirement. It is more than doubtful whether the exaction of further classical knowledge than is absolutely requisite to a clear comprehension of the technical etymology of science, and so much mathematical instruction, as is essential for the understanding of physical problems and chemical nomenclature, would not embarrass, rather than assist the student by increasing the already overloaded duties of young men, who are expected to enter life at the age of from 21 to 25 years. In estimating the extent of the *desirable* we should not overlook the boundaries of the *practicable*.

There occurs to me but one more subject to which I will presume to direct your attention; and that is one which calls loudly for prompt action, if any act of ours can aid in the restriction of a most serious and fatal evil. The effects of the improper and voluntary use of opium are rapidly becoming almost as dreadful and deadly in the destruction of human energies and human life as even the abuse of alcohol. No day elapses without a multitude of demands upon the druggists for portions of this poison, to be used by the victims of habit as ordinary stimulants. The messengers are frequently children, and the apothecary; without restraint, deals out the article and receives the money with as little compunction as an ordinary bar-tender at a way-side groggeries! Men and women

who would be shocked at the idea, or imputation of visiting a bar for liquor as a beverage, *can* and *do* resort for opium to the apothecary without suspicion and with perfect impunity. This vice prevails to an extent that would astonish society, were it uncovered of the veil, which the semblance of professional authority hangs over the victim and the dealer. Can nothing be done to check this growing evil—this leprosy of mind and body? We have influence with many legislatures, and our suggestions have always been received with marked respect and attention. Gentlemen, can we do nothing to obviate this evil? Alas! it is too frequently manifested in our own brotherhood! It is not for me, in the position with which you have honored me, to propose *any measure*; but I most heartily commend the subject to your earnest consideration, as it affects “our honor, our interests, our respectability.”

And now, in closing these remarks, which have extended vastly beyond my intention or expectation, permit me to thank you once more for the honor you have conferred, once more to appeal for your kindly support in the exercise of official duty, and to express an ardent wish that, as we are cheered by the consciousness of past usefulness, the action of the present session may enhance the feeling, and when, under the blessing of the GREAT RULER, we shall have tightened the bonds of brotherly union, at this annual reassembling, we may leave, with none but happy recollections, the beautiful “Queen City of the West.”

